

After the introductions, Ken Burleson of TGS Engineers, updated everyone on the events since the last Steering Committee Meeting. A new Corridor 3 was developed between Corridors 1 and 2 and the Improve Existing 70 alternative was eliminated.

The feasibility of Corridor 3 depended on a foraging analysis for the nearby red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW). The foraging analysis concluded that suitable habitat for the woodpecker would exist after construction of an alignment within Corridor 3. As a result, functional designs and cost estimates were completed for Corridor 3. Using a handout provided to all attendees, he proceeded to describe the impacts listed in the matrix for each alternative. Based on comparative analysis, TGS Engineers recommended Corridor 3 to be noted as the preferred corridor in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement due to lowest total cost and wetland impacts.

A more lengthy discussion began concerning the fragmented lands from each corridor. The acreage of Croatan National Forest between US 70 and the alternatives was given. NCDOT has been working since the last interagency meeting on land transfer possibilities. This process centers around forest service land and wetlands mitigation for the acreage fragmented.

The City of Havelock was supportive of Corridor 3 as a compromise between 1 and 2. They pointed out that Corridor 2 had many relocations, most of them near Lake Road. Ken Burleson asked if there were any objections to Corridor 3. The agencies upon further review had no objections. The USFS was supportive of Corridor 3 and explained that their NEPA documentation would be incorporated into the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). A meeting was held immediately after with NCDOT to coordinate this integration.

Planning and Environmental concluded that a newsletter to the public should be mailed out before an informal informational meeting. The DEIS will be completed this spring. Thereafter, a formal public hearing will be held to solicit public opinion on the preferred corridor.